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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST TOUR, CHALLENGES
FOR ARAB GOVERNMENTS, JAPANESE DPRK POLICY, TALIBAN RESURGENCE

¶1. SUMMARY: Youth-oriented "Al-Shabiba" calls Secretary Rice's Middle East tour "nothing new." Privately owned "Al-Watan" writes about political challenges facing Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and claims the Taliban is resurgent in Afghanistan. Government-owned "Oman" says Japan's North Korea policy is worthy of emulation. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. Omani dailies reported on the heavy death toll in Iraq this month, and covered President Bush's statements regarding Iraq and Vietnam. Continuing coverage of North Korea's nuclear program was prominent in all papers.

BLOCK QUOTES: MIDDLE EAST TOUR NOTHING NEW

¶3. On October 21, youth-oriented, Arabic language "Al-Shabiba" (circulation 20,000) commented on "Secretary Rice's Middle East Tour":

"Rice's tours of the Middle East usually bring nothing new and are only aimed at securing U.S. and Israeli interests...in her recent tour, did Rice bring anything new to the Arabs? All indicators in the Middle East region confirm that the answer is no. We Arabs are still looking forward to a change in U.S. policy and for new results that guarantee a halt to Israeli military operations against the Palestinian people and construction of new Israeli settlements, in return for the suspension of operations being carried out by the Palestinian resistance against Israel. This is to encourage the establishment of a new platform from which an active and productive peace process could be launched, and to make a success of the Arab move within the UN Security Council's circles. Also, as one of the Middle East countries partly occupied by Israel, Syria has joint interests with its neighbors. America and the other international forces should be aware of this and urge Israel to start negotiations with Damascus. The U.S. should also review its threatening policy for the sake of reaching a full and final peace in the area, and realize that Syrian participation in the Arab-Israeli dialogue is essential. Arabs must also exert their utmost efforts to achieve national reconciliation in Iraq by urging America to start withdrawing its troops.

¶4. On October 17, a columnist in privately owned "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) wrote about "Three Governments Seeking A Solution:"

The nearer we are to the end of Ramadan, the more we approach the most intense point of conflict for three Arab governments that are currently preoccupied with their own difficult realities. The Lebanese government will confront the circle of risk from the first day of Eid al-Fitr and the following days. The opposition is fighting assiduously to overthrow it, while the majority is sticking to it and almost trying to support it by force to avoid its collapse. Yet Siniora's government has the blessings of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United States, among others. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State David Welch might visit Beirut to express support for the existing government...meanwhile, the opposition insists that the present government should not supervise the presidential elections.... [In Palestine], Abbas and Haniya seem like parallel lines that will never meet. Though the situation in Lebanon has not developed to the stage of armed fighting, the Palestinian land has currently reached the zero point of tension and one bullet might set the whole area on fire. Moreover, while the superpowers support Seniora's government in Lebanon against the opposition, we find that Israel, America and some other Arab countries are supporting Abbas and expressing their enmity towards Hamas and its leader. At the same time, Israel is working openly to divide the two parties and kindle civil war between them. The third point of tension is Iraq, where some parties are plotting a horrible collapse of Al Maliki's government. The major problem is not between this government and its predecessor, but in the occupation forces and their inability to exercise full power over the country.... These three countries are fighting now for existence.

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JAPAN MOST BALANCED ON NORTH KOREA

¶5. On October 16, government-owned "Oman" (circulation 38,000) wrote about "The Japanese Lesson" regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons:

"Japan's reaction to the North Korean nuclear test appears to be the most balanced stance from both the political and military aspect. This is expressed by the Japanese Prime Minister's statement that his country would not be dragged into a nuclear arms race. However, he stressed the necessity of applying severe sanctions on North Korea. In fact, this is a reflection of a Japanese political principle, which considers that world civilization should transcend the need to show power, including nuclear power. Japan possesses huge technological capabilities and could surmount North Korea's capabilities in this field very shortly.... Japan's trend could be a suitable example to follow by countries all over the world, to get rid of the desire to dominate through possessing nuclear power in what is now called the balance of terror.... Japan feels that...Pyongyang could be tamed to a friendly reconciliation due to its need for more external aid. Of course, this would be true only if North Korea is not willing to commit suicide, a matter that is not accounted for in Pyongyang's policy, at least at this time.... Could Japan's stance constitute a basis for a new initiative in international relations? We hope so."

TALIBAN'S STAR SHINING AGAIN

¶6. On October 21 a columnist in "Al-Watan" wrote about "Afghanistan and A Return to the Pre-Taliban Era":

"Five years have passed since the invasion of Afghanistan and the situation looks as if nothing new has happened. What remains from the invasion campaign is only its empty slogan...Afghanistan has regressed even to the pre-Taliban era.... The Taliban's star has started to shine again. This militant movement has managed to

control the eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan during the last five months and return to the strongholds that it left at the beginning of the U.S. campaign...the existence of more than 80,000 Pakistani soldiers throughout the Pakistani borders has not deterred Al Qaida and Taliban operations on Afghan soil. Also, the Karzai government has failed to dominate all the Afghani lands, and its influence does not exceed the Afghani Capital of Kabul...the Taliban has succeeded in increasing its forces from 100 members to nearly 400...it is very difficult to say that there is any true political system being built in Afghanistan....no progress has been witnessed in rehabilitation and reconstruction despite the fact that almost 24 reconstruction agencies are currently operating in Afghanistan. The problem now is not bound to the failure of the American war against terrorism only, but also to the failure of the American example for managing the international conflict in its new form. America has entered into Afghanistan knowing that it deals with a state that could be classified as a failure by all academic standards. However, the ideological rashness of the new conservatives has made them blind and unable to see the truth, and has tempted them to believe that it is very possible to establish a modern state simply through a radio and television culture, shaving the beards of the Afghani men and removing the veils from the Afghani women's faces."

FONTENEAU